

No. 6.

Sir JOHN ROSS to A. BARCLAY Esq.

"Felix" Discovery Vessel,

Sir,

Stranraer, 25th September 1851.

In reference to an extract of my despatch of 29th July 1851, sent by Captain Austin, I have to acquaint you, that after leaving our winter quarters at Cornwallis Island, on the 12th August, we parted company with the vessels under Captain Austin and those in charge of Captain Penny off the Wellington Channel on the following day, and after having made a further search at Beechy Island, we proceeded, without much obstruction, to the eastward, and having made the land in latitude 76° N., we used every effort, between the 15th and 25th August, to close with the coast, but were prevented by impenetrable ice extending from the east land to seaward 20 miles, between the latitude of 75° and 77° N.; and it being evident that by getting round this immense body of ice either by the northward or southward, even if it were possible, that we must be obliged to spend another winter in order to make the proposed examination, and for which we had not provisions, being originally victualled for only eighteen months, I was therefore under the necessity of bearing up for Godhaven (Liefly) in Disco, still in hopes of obtaining a supply of provisions from what the commander of the "North Star" was directed by the Admiralty to land there, and which would enable me probably to obtain a position north of Wolstenholme Sound, from whence I should, during the ensuing spring, have set the question at rest; but here, I regret to say, I was disappointed. I arrived at Godhaven on the 30th August in company with the Danish Government Brig, "Hoalfisken," which I fell in with on the 29th, and to my mortification I found that Mr. Saunders, the master commander of the "North Star" had not, according to his orders, been to Godhaven to land any provisions; and although the manager and magistrate at Godhaven, in absence of the Governor, most readily supplied us with the refreshments so necessary for the health of my crew, he could not spare us provisions for another season; and being obliged to defer my intention of examining the coast between Whale Sound and Melville Bay, it only remained for me to obtain the deposition on oath, touching the fate of the missing ships, of my interpreter Adam Beck, who on the 1st September was carried before the magistrate, and being warned that if it was found by a future expedition, which would probably be sent out, that he had sworn to what was not true he would incur a severe punishment. Whereupon he voluntarily made the enclosed deposition, which he signed and swore to in my presence and in that of the magistrate. I regret that there was no person at Godhaven who could translate this document either into Danish or English, although it was perfectly understood by the magistrate's lady, who is the daughter of a former Governor, was born and brought up in Greenland, but could not translate into Danish. The substance of this document was, however, that the two missing ships were actually wrecked on the coast north of Cape York; that some of the crews reached the land in a state of destitution, and perished during the winters of 1846 and 1847, either by cold, hunger, or by the treachery of a hostile tribe of natives; that articles belonging to the ships could be shown, which would prove the truth of his assertion; and that he would accompany any future expedition that might be sent to ascertain the truth.

It is true indeed that Peterson the Dane, who is interpreter on board the "Lady Franklin," flatly contradicted the report of Adam Beck; but circumstances have transpired, and facts have come to light, which have cast serious doubts on the veracity, if not on the respectability of Peterson, while they have in a material degree corroborated the testimony of Adam Beck, and have also in a satisfactory manner accounted for the boy now on board the "Assistance" being on the side of Peterson. I am also authorized by the residents and magistrates of Disco to say, that they firmly believe that what Adam Beck has deposed is true, as he was born in Greenland, was brought up a Christian, can both read and write, is well informed on the nature of an oath and its consequences, and, under such circumstances, the natives have never been found to swear falsely.

And having myself taken every thing into consideration I am clearly of opinion that the missing ships under the command of Sir John Franklin having remained at their winter quarters, Beechy Island, until September 1846, and